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Meeting of NPA 6, Aiken Hall, Champlain College, November 3, 2016

Approximately 10 people in attendance plus speakers and steering committee members Peter Keating, Clare Wool, and Charles Simpson. Phet Keomanyvanh represented CEDO. Videographers from Champlain College: Julia Leonard and Mathew McArdle. Wool provided snacks at social time 6:45-7:00pm

Minutes:

1. Peter moderated and began the meeting at 7:10. Minutes from the October 6 meeting were presented and approved.
2. Stephanie Seguino gave an update on School Board activity. She predicted better times for the district. The new contract will increase teacher pay 2.75% this contract year with some increases in insurance paid by teachers. The Board is now preparing next year's budget. One teacher has won an award as an outstanding arts educator and Clare Wool, a parent with children in the district and a member of the NPA 6 steering committee, was recognized for outstanding contributions to the school system. The district is examining expenditures and found \$7,000 was being billed for phones no longer in use and now their service is cancelled; \$30,000 was saved with our now copier contract. There are five areas for public input to the new budget, a process lasting through January. See the Board webpages for particulars for on-line link for participation. We are now emphasizing long-rang planning. Question (Q): Is this a multi-year contract? Answer (A): A one year contract was just concluded but it is a matter for negotiations whether the coming contract will be one or more years.
3. Sandy Yusen and student Jeff Deal representing Champlain College presented an update: The CC Board has approved the Eagles Landing dorm budget and approved a construction contract with H.B. Cummings. Still some steps to go through prior to construction but we are aiming at a Fall 2018 occupancy. The Center for Women and Gender on campus is now open and provides support. The college's theater will present Blue Stockings Nov. 3-5 in Alumni Auditorium. CC's Sears Lane facility will be sharing space with Generator to stimulate new business ventures. Q. What's the start date for Eagles Landing construction? A. To be determined.
4. Lisa Kingsbury and Jim Barr of UVM along with a representative of Ruggles House presented a plan for UVM buses taking South Prospect street to stop at the stop sign on Maple Street and pick up members of the public including Rufflwa residents free of charge. This enhances rider coordination with the CCTA buses. UVM's bus runs 7:45 am to 4:45 pm on weekdays during the college year, not including summers. This policy is in response to requests from residents of Ruggles House. Q. In your research, have you found companies offering electric buses powered with batteries? A. (Barr): Yes. They cost from \$700,000 up to a million but we are looking at these. They can run for a full 8 hour shift between charges, which takes 3 hours. Q. Will Spinner Place students be accommodated in the new campus housing? A. Yes. Timeline uncertain.
5. Candidates for State Office Forum: Peter asked candidates to specify their priorities for the coming session, should they be elected.

Mary Sullivan, House candidate: She seeks reelection and has served on the energy committee which will be her focus. She worked for BED. Last session she co-sponsored a carbon pollution tax bill which came close to passing but failed. Taxing carbon use is a priority but must be done rationally. In the last bill, 90% would be returned to taxpayers as a tax deduction and 10% would have gone for weatherization which is an investment that returns 200%.

Barbara Rachelson, House candidate: She's on the education committee. She's a social worker directing a non-profit and defines herself as a child advocate. She's proud of her co-sponsorship of a bill to criminalize the use of internet revenge pornography. Efficiency in the use of tax money is a priority. We spend more on prisons than our support for higher education in this state. She wants to see that license plate readers are used responsibly.

Michael Sirotkin, Senate candidate: He began his legal career with legal aid and as a lobbyist specializes in consumer-based clients. Income inequality is his main issue. He's on the agriculture committee and proposed a farm tax to help lake cleanup. It failed. Funding was switched to a property transfer tax which will sunset this year. He worked to increase aid for the farm-to-school meals program. With sales tax revenue on goods down, we need to consider expanding that tax to include services. With Airbnb, tax revenue from the hospitality industry is down and that problem needs to be addressed. He co-sponsored a bill on the opiate problem as well as one on family leave.

Philip Baruth, Senate candidate: He's on the education and economic development committees. The level of student debt is unconscionable; it is like indentured servitude. He co-sponsored a bill that allows high school students to gain a year and a half of college credits while in high school without paying tuition. He worked on a bill to fund the closing costs for first-time buyers of houses, with the money returned when the home is sold. The fund is approaching solvency. He supports background checks on gun buyers.

Tim Ashe, candidate for Senate: My interest is in reducing the jail population. In 2008 we had 675 inmates in for-profit out-of-state prisons; now we have only 220. This is the result of sentencing reform. Last year the legislature passed a bill that required those between 16 and 17 to be treated as minors for sentencing purposes, not as adults. This gives them more rehabilitation services. It will take time to fully implement.

Ginny Lyons, candidate for Senate: She affirms the value of all issues mentioned up to this point. The opiate bill was good and it includes funds for public engagement aimed at better integrating community services, for example the transition from the E.R. to a mental health facility or from hospital to home. She's on the agriculture committee and that addresses pollution issues connected with agricultural practices. We need to fund loans and grants the clean up our lakes. She's working to change the Citizens United ruling.

Debbie Ingram, candidate for House: She's been on the Williston school board for five years and their planning commission as well as being Exec. Secretary of Vermont Interfaith Action. She wants jobs that pay; healthcare that works; and housing people can afford. She'd work to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hr., create paid family leave, and a medicare-for-all program. She'd seek incentives for developers to build more affordable housing.

John Gifford, candidate for House: He served in the U.S. Coast Guard and then as a school district business manager and now consults in this area. He was on Milton's school board and was the town's treasurer. He experienced the hard time some people have paying their taxes and water bills. He'd reduce the property tax. He questions the cost of the college courses taken in high school and paid for by the district. He wants to keep jobs in the state and to reduce college debt. He'd try to marry the high school curriculum closer to the needs of employers. TIF was successful in Milton and he'd like to see it work in rural areas as well.

Chris Pearson, candidate for Senate: He was in the House and now is running for Senate. Climate change is a key issue. He entered politics working for Bernie Sanders. Economic justice is also a key issue. The median average income for Vermonters is \$53,000, meaning that half of families earn below that number. He's vice-chair of the health care committee. Climate change concerns don't fall into any one committee's responsibilities. He's proud of the progress the legislature made on prescription drugs. We passed a transparency bill that requires providers to substantiate the reasons for their drug prices. Housing is health care. The more housing we have the more money is saved at the emergency room where the homeless come for treatment. It's the same with criminal justice reform; it pays for itself.

Curt McCormick, candidate for House: He previously represented Rutland in the legislature for seven terms. He's on the transportation committee and looking at climate issues. Property taxes are a concern and he'd shift some of the burden to the income tax.

General Questions: Q. As a grad. student I'm apprehensive about my economic future in Vermont because it doesn't have a growing tax base. Few of my friends are planning to stay after graduation. How will you halt the brain drain? A. (Pearson): This is a rural state challenge across the country. Vermont technical colleges are addressing this mismatch between education and job needs. Climate change could provide the answer if we could be the Silicon Valley of climate change solutions. (Lyons): The data shows that an equal number of people are coming into the state as leaving. We could specialize in the infrastructure that facilitates working at home. We need to limit college loan repayment amounts. (Rachelson): We need a web portal to link employers with job seekers. We need loan forgiveness and to expand family healthcare coverage to age 26. (Curt McCormick): Desirable cities have efficient public transportation. In my district 32% of residents do without a car, which makes for less sprawl and a more attractive state. Q. I moved here 7 years ago and we see Vermont as our future. It is important to keep our quality of life. A. (Sirotkin): I have sons who left the state to pursue their careers but one may return due to our quality of life. People value the working landscape and we need to promote our own products that it produces. We need to focus on small business, not subsidize huge international corporations. (Baruth): For a century, Vermont novelists have spoken of this brain drain. Partnering our high schools with employers may be an answer. We've done this successfully in some cases, as with G.W. Plastics. Q. The F-35 scheduled to arrive here in the next few years is sucking up our national wealth for an offensive airplane that is polluting our local area with sound. Will you oppose basing the plane here? A. (Sullivan): I'm opposed. (Rachelson): We have no role in this as a legislature. (Sirotkin): We're not involved. The sound is loud. I don't know what can be done. (Baruth): I'm opposed to basing them here and I'm

against the recent expansion of house demolition around the airport. (Lyons): The sound level is too high. It isn't a decision we can make in the legislature but it's not appropriate here. (Ingram): I'm against it for reasons of noise and for the loss of affordable housing. What sort of jobs do we want? is the question. (Gifford): I voted to support it while in Colchester. It's going to happen. (Pearson): I'm opposed. I don't see what we can do. It is a boondoggle that may well collapse of its own failures. (McCormick): I'm opposed to it in our area. It is not a defensive weapon. Q. California voters are considering a referendum that ties drug prices paid by the state to what the Veterans Administration negotiates with drug providers. Can't Vermont? A. (Pearson): We are watching this with interest. Companies might boycott little Vermont but if it passes in California, we might be able to link up. We have just scratched the surface on this issue.

Meeting adjourned at 9:05 pm

Respectfully submitted, Charles Simpson